



The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 32
Issue 3 September

Article 20

2005

Shut Out: Low Income Mothers and Higher Education in Post-Welfare America. Valerie Polakow, Sandra Butler, Luisa Stormer Deprez and Peggy Kahn (Eds.).

Sarah Carnochan
University of California, Berkeley

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw>



Part of the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Carnochan, Sarah (2005) "*Shut Out: Low Income Mothers and Higher Education in Post-Welfare America.* Valerie Polakow, Sandra Butler, Luisa Stormer Deprez and Peggy Kahn (Eds.).," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 32 : Iss. 3 , Article 20.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol32/iss3/20>

This Book Note is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Work at ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.



inclination to plow through heavy theoretical tomes and many rely on secondary sources when seeking to understand theoretical writing. Lemert's collection makes original writings accessible and manageable. This is a valuable book which should be extensively used in social work and social policy classes.

Valerie Polakow, Sandra Butler, Luisa Stormer Deprez and Peggy Kahn (Eds.), *Shut Out: Low Income Mothers and Higher Education in Post-Welfare America*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004. \$75.00 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

This volume examines the impact of welfare reform on low income women's access to and experiences in post-secondary education and training. The editors have assembled a collection that integrates policy analysis and qualitative research examining the experiences of low income mothers on welfare. While there is an extensive body of research literature on welfare to work programs, produced primarily by large research institutes and funded by federal or state government entities, the majority of the studies have been quantitative, often drawing upon administrative data collected by government agencies. Research that explores the perspective and daily lives of welfare recipients, particularly individuals participating in higher education or vocational training programs, has been limited. This book therefore offers an important contribution to the field.

Many of the large quantitative studies have employed an experimental design, leading policy makers and researchers to attribute a high degree of validity to their findings that welfare to work programs promoting education and training are less effective than work-first programs aimed at moving recipients immediately into the workforce. A closer reading of this literature reveals that these findings are problematic. The differences in employment rates and earnings achieved by education oriented programs, on the one hand, and by work-first programs, on the other, are minimal, and neither type of program has been demonstrated to reduce poverty rates significantly for participants. Moreover, education oriented programs are typically focused on GED acquisition or limited vocational training. Welfare to work programs offering higher education opportunities for women on welfare have been rare. Consequently, we know much less about their

potential effects. However, studies have consistently shown an association between higher education and higher employment rates, higher earnings, and reduced poverty rates.

The first chapter of the book reviews the research on welfare to work programs, arguing persuasively that the quantitative, experimental design studies suffer from a number of flaws. In particular, they employ narrow outcome criteria, omit the perspective of program participants, and assume that individual rather than structural characteristics are the critical barriers to employment for welfare recipients. Chapters 2, 3 and 4 present compelling examples of low income mothers' experiences in education and training programs. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 examine higher education policy and practices and offer illustrations of their impact on low income women. The detailed analyses of local policies and practices at specific educational institutions are especially valuable in the context of welfare reform's devolution of welfare policy to the states. Chapters 8 through 11 describe examples of advocacy campaigns to enact policies designed to improve access to and increase supports for higher education for low income women. These experiences depict the serious obstacles facing welfare policy reform efforts, but also offer hope. Overall, the contributors make a strong case for higher education and training for low income women. In some instances however, where qualitative data are presented, more comprehensive discussion of research design and methods would give greater confidence in the conclusions reached.

Sarah Carnochan, University of California, Berkeley

Ralph C. Brashier, *Inheritance Law and the Evolving Family*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004. \$69.50 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

In this informative new book, Professor Ralph C. Brashier of the University of Memphis School of Law presents a fascinating analysis of how the changing structure of the family is impacting inheritance laws. Many different family arrangements are considered in this book including families headed by single parents, gay and lesbian couples and step-parents, as well as families with children born with the help of advanced reproductive technology.